



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE FINANCIAL REWARDS OF AMERICAN AUTHORS

A prominent magazine writer recently asserted that before the eighteenth century there was no known example of an author, other than a playwright, who lived entirely on the rewards of his literary labors. Great Britain has several examples to show of men who were living by their pens during that period, but not until the eighteenth century is lapsing into the nineteenth does America have a professional author, in the person of Jedidiah Morse, the "Father of American Geography." In 1784 Morse published *Geography Made Easy*, at New Haven, thus inaugurating that long series of text-books which by reason of their clearness and beauty have caused the American schoolboy to be envied by those of all other countries. Morse's book was the first of its character published in this country; and was so remunerative that by 1797 he had published three other works of the same general character. Morse had clearly discerned the needs of the aspiring young federation that in its newly won liberty regarded few things as impossible to the educated mind. The Revolution had created an insistent demand for American productions; and when the energies of the people were released from war and turned to the work of construction and reconstruction, there was a clamorous need for purely American books of an educational nature.

There were few men in those days who could write a successful text-book. Few of these looked with favor upon authorship of any sort, save perhaps the preparation of legal or of state papers. Others turned all their energies into purely economic channels. Morse has a strong competitor in Noah Webster for 'first' honors. Indeed, as Webster's *Speller* of classic memory was published in 1783 and has been called the first book published in the United States, Webster may be considered by some our first professional author. Webster at first dissipated his energies in more or less amateurish efforts in statecraft that can hardly be regarded as professional. Morse, on the other hand, concentrated his efforts on a series of works about geography, each of

which aided in selling the others. To Webster also finally came the recompense of his long efforts in behalf of American letters, but he waited longer than did his less discursive and less gifted contemporary.

Neither man, however, entered the realm of pure literature. They lived in a too practical age. Even had they turned to *belles-lettres*, they must have encountered two influences which would have rendered professional authorship in their day an almost hopeless venture. Not until 1891 is the American author freed from the menace of being undersold by books just as entertaining as his own. With the International Copyright Law of that year it was determined that our future poets and novelists should no longer be undersold, and in some cases actually forced from the markets, by the cheap pirated works of British authors. The other influence, although Webster himself fought ardently against it and measurably weakened its power, is discernible in some quarters to the present day. Long after we had acquired our political freedom we were still intellectually tributary to Great Britain. Indeed, so far as literature is concerned, it cannot be said that we had a well-defined national consciousness until far within the nineteenth century.

But when Charles Brockden Brown appeared with his *Alcuin* in 1797, what were the conditions awaiting the bold professional author who ventured for a living into the humanities? Emerson, according to the belief of many, first gave to the world an effective declaration of American intellectual independence in his *The American Scholar* of 1837. In reality, this address of Emerson is but the enduring form given by literary genius to many previous efforts of men to achieve an intellectual freedom that should measurably accord with our political one.

For more than a generation, however, these efforts represented the cause of a devoted few. Little did the average reader at the end of the eighteenth century perceive that independence of ideas and ideals is more necessary to true freedom than separate geographical boundaries. Moreover, much of the intellectual aristocracy of the young republic was as consciously Tory in its intellectual sympathies as had been Boucher, Galloway, and Leonard themselves. "An astonishing respect for

the arts and literature of their parent country, and a blind imitation of its manners, are still prevalent among the Americans," wrote Webster in 1789. Webster's entire life was much in the nature of a crusade against intellectual colonialism, a warfare in which he found aid from such men as Franklin, Belknap, Hazard, Freneau, Trumbull, and Neal. On the other hand, probably the most potent single force in determining the literary tastes of Americans during a large part of Webster's lifetime was exerted by Joseph Dennie, editor of the *Portfolio*, and generally it was used in a manner unfavorable to American authors. The larger towns of the period were usually fortresses of British subserviency, to be reduced only by long sieges.

It was such a pervasive atmosphere of literary subserviency that surrounded Freneau and makes us understand why, in disgust with the returns of authorship, he writes in the *Expedition of Timothy Taunus*:—

"Were this cartload of learning the whole that I knew,
I could sooner get forward by mending a shoe;
I could sooner grow rich by the axe or the spade,
Or thrive by the meanest mechanical trade.
The tinker himself would be richer than I,
For the tinker has something that people will buy."

In 1800 Brown declared that "Bookmaking is the dullest of all trades, and the utmost that any American can look for in his native country is to be reimbursed his unavoidable expenses." Brown, it will be remembered, was a novelist whose last work appeared in 1801, nine years before his death. Part of his failure to publish during that time may be ascribed to his physical condition; but when we consider the immense popularity of those best-sellers of his time, *Sandford and Merton* by Day; the gothic romances of Mrs Radcliffe; the sentimental ones of Mackenzie; *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, by Mrs. More; and, most popular of all, Mrs. Roche's *Children of the Abbey*, we may well understand why Brown had such ill success financially. During his time we were yet waging a stern struggle against imperious material necessities; but had this, our first, man of pure letters been protected by an international copyright, in all probability his returns would have been fairly adequate, in spite of the distrust of the intellectually *élite* for American books.

One of our most prominent publishers wrote in 1819 that a general impression prevailed that we did not have and could never have a literature. It was, he said, positively injurious to the commercial credit of a bookseller to undertake American works "unless they might be Morse's *Geographies*, classical books, schoolbooks, Watts's *Psalms and Hymns*, or something of that class." Yet regardless of this knowledge and against the advice of several booksellers, he published Trumbull's poems the next year. The author received \$1,000 and 100 copies. When the account was closed, the publisher was out just \$1,000, a sum which he philosophically charges to the patriotic attempt to encourage American literature.

Under the combined influences of indifference to nationalism and national ideals in literature, colonial subserviency, and the failure of legal protection for American books against those of Europe, so doubtful had become the financial reward for American authorship that in 1820 Charles Wiley, one of the most prominent publishers of New York, told the poet Halleck that he was the only writer in America, Irving excepted, whose works he would risk publishing. Halleck's case offers a good opportunity to gauge the returns of literature from about 1820 to 1865. He was a man of remarkable talent, yet fairly representative of his period. *The Croaker Papers* had made him famous. So popular was he, indeed, that his publisher made him the offer, highly generous for the time, of \$500 for another canto of *Fanny*. Between his first and his last book of importance stretches a period of forty-six years, during which his pen was always busy. Yet the entire returns of his literary lifetime were but \$17,500. In the very middle of this period, 1844, Whipple, once famous in American criticism, writes: "The least lucrative profession in the United States is that of authorship. Every prudent man avoids it as he does a pestilence. A writer who attempts to live on the manufactures of his imagination is continually coquetting with starvation."

Irving had to meet just such conditions as Halleck. By 1842, Irving was practically driven from the market. He received a larger income for a time from the sales of his books in Great Britain than from the American sales. Then Bohn, of London,

began to pirate his works, and his legitimate publishers finally gave up the field to him. The demand for his writings had ceased, Irving was told by his Philadelphia publishers in 1846. G. P. Putnam took up his works about this time, however, and succeeded not only in making them pay, but in inducing Irving to leave his desk in the law office of his brother once more to take up authorship. "There is no necessity, John," he said to his brother, "for my bothering further with the law. Here is a fool of a publisher going to give me a thousand dollars a year for doing nothing."

It must have been some knowledge of Irving's experience and of literary conditions in general that caused the apparent modesty of Bryant in 1823. When asked to name his price for contributions to *The United States Literary Gazette*, he suggested two dollars each as a fair amount. He was made and accepted an offer of two hundred dollars a year for an average of one hundred lines a month. Is there any wonder that he so far descended from his Jove-like dignity as to write, apropos of his new position on the staff of *The New York Evening Post*, that "politics and a bellyful are better than poetry and starvation"? It has been asserted, and with apparent correctness, that when Bryant came to New York no writers other than editors were living by their pens. Halleck was in business. Drake was a physician, as was also that most erratic of geniuses, Percival, while Sands was a lawyer. Verplanck, Irving, and Cooper had some private means.

Perhaps even as early as 1820 New England had produced, in the person of John Neal, an author who was making a fair living by his pen. At least Goodrich, whose knowledge of American literature was, for his day, phenomenal, said that he succeeded in supporting himself "very handsomely" by his literary labors. Now Neal was born at Portland, Maine, as was Longfellow. If Neal found literature such a paying profession, why was the elder Longfellow so averse to his son's pursuit of it? When the future poet asked, in 1824, for a graduate year at Harvard, his father answered: "There is not wealth enough in this country to afford encouragement and patronage to merely literary men." The reply was but part—a small part—of the

truth. Americans were buying enough books of *belles-lettres* to have rendered a literary life profitable to our author; but they were the works of foreign writers, in most cases, upon which no copyright duty had to be paid. Moreover, their popularity had already been tested abroad, and a good seller in Great Britain was likely to have a large sale in this country. A publisher risked nothing in republishing the works of Scott, for example, because, writes one publisher, "the appearance of a new tale from his pen caused a greater sensation in the United States than did some of the battles of Napoleon, which decided the fates of thrones and empires."

It was the popularity of Scott, Miss Porter, Mrs. Roche, Mrs. More, Miss Edgeworth, and other pirated transatlantic authors as much as the lack of wealth and provincial catering to European critical opinion that motivated the classical example of the nadir of our literary self-respect. When Cooper first came before the American public it was as a would-be novelist of British life. To him it appeared that in 1820 there was no hope for a purely American novel. His publishers seemed to agree with him the next year, when he wrote *The Spy*. To reassure their nervousness, Cooper wrote the last part of this book before he had even mapped out the bulk of it.

One reason why our early writers obtained such meagre rewards for their literary efforts is that they were unwilling to advertise themselves. The distaste for receiving money for work in *belles-lettres* which Byron voiced in Europe was not unknown in America. Cooper's first novel appeared anonymously. Halleck seemed entirely indifferent to literary fame or financial reward. Up to 1839 he did not place his name on a single contribution to the press nor upon the title-page of any of his published volumes. Percival was not merely giving voice to his own eccentricity, then, when he wrote in 1822: "I know of no more contemptible being than an author who writes for money. He converts the only shrine where the mind can find a sure asylum into a huckster's shop. If I must labour for subsistence, I will not labour with my pen, particularly when I am paid at a meaner rate than a shoebblack."

Yet Cooper, before he began to quarrel with the American public, was, in spite of his many failures, fairly well paid. In

fact, one contemporary novelist was so generously rewarded that the gentle Longfellow voices his disgust. In 1838 he writes of Professor Ingraham that "he is tremendous—really tremendous. I think he may say that he writes the worst novels ever written by anybody. But they sell; he gets twelve hundred dollars apiece."

Only the next year Longfellow has to accept three hundred and seventy-five dollars for *Hyperion* and to comfort himself with the fact that the book was well printed and widely circulated. Trowbridge records from memory a conversation which he once had with him after fairly modern prices began to prevail for literary productions. Longfellow could never, he declared, get over the feeling that one hundred dollars was a large amount to receive for a poem of perhaps not over half as many lines. At Trowbridge's demurral, Longfellow replied that had his friend written as many poems for three and five dollars each as he had, Trowbridge would think so too. *The Psalm of Life* was sold to *Knickerbocker's Magazine*, in 1838, for three dollars. In a few years, however, through the agency of Samuel Ward in New York, Longfellow was enabled to obtain from fifteen to twenty dollars for his poems, "really a dazzling price in those days." *The Hanging of the Crane* was sold to the *New York Ledger* in 1873. The negotiations were lengthy. Finally Bonner, "the Barnum of Publishers," paid Longfellow three thousand dollars for these two hundred lines and gave Ward one third as much for his mediation. Afterwards when the poem appeared in book form, it had an immense sale. Trowbridge asserts that for its length it was the best paid piece of literary work ever produced.

Yet Longfellow could hardly grow rich from the returns of one poem. In the second quarter of the last century Willis and Prescott were the two authors who were the most consistently rewarded for their work. Barnes, Stephens, and Anthon had incomes equal to either of these, but they were writers or editors of text-books or works of reference. When Willis boasted to Longfellow of making ten thousand dollars a year, the latter wished that he himself had made as many hundred.

In 1842 Higginson records in his diary a conversation which he had had with Ellery Channing, who thought, incorrectly, that

Hawthorne was the only man in America that was supporting himself by his pen. Possibly Channing was right if he meant that Hawthorne alone was making a living out of pure literature as distinct from journalism. Hawthorne, he continues, was paid more for his magazine articles than anyone else except Willis, who, because of his phenomenal popularity at this period, could get five dollars a page at times and as high as fifty dollars for an article. In this same year Lowell thought he might safely calculate upon earning four hundred dollars a year by his writings. Hawthorne's income was really small, and he published many little masterpieces through the periodicals of the day, before they paid him at all adequately or before he ceased to be "the obscurest man-of-letters in America."

Two years later, in 1844, Prescott wrote to an English correspondent that the compensation of the *North American Review* was only a dollar a printed page, although a popular writer could sometimes command twice that amount by contracting for a certain number of pages a year.

Why was it that the magazines of the forties and fifties did not pay better? There was public wealth enough to have supported them, and in all probability there was as much interest in literature as at the present time, population considered. The true explanation lies in the formidable competition which the publishers of legitimate magazines had to encounter from those that had stolen their contents from European writers. The publishers of magazines won a more brilliant victory over the evils attendant on piracy than did the book publishers, but their fight was scarcely less strenuous.

A day of ill omen for the purse of the American literary man it was when the *Great Western* and the *Sirius*, the first steamers to cross the Atlantic entirely by steam, arrived at New York, on the same day, in 1838. In that eager age of reading and of yearning for the latest European success, the possibility of making journalism of literature was not overlooked. The closeness of communication brought about by steam made it feasible. In our great publishing centres, mammoth journals, stuffed with the spoils of transatlantic literature, began to spring up. Writers everywhere were disgusted with the infamous condition of the

copyright laws. Just what was the state of publishing ethics in those days is vividly illustrated for us by Willis in a prospectus for a new magazine sent out Christmas Eve, 1838. In *The Pirate* he intends, he says, "to take advantage of the privilege assured to us by our piratical law of copyright; and in the name of American authors (for our own benefit) 'convey' to our columns the cream and spirit of everything that ventures to light in France, England, and Germany. As to original American productions, we shall, as the publishers do, take what we can get for nothing (that is good), holding, as the publishers do, that while we can get Boz and Bulwer for a thank-ye or less, it is not pocket-wise to pay much for Halleck and Irving."

It is true that Willis started his magazine partly in protest against the copyright laws and in a measure as an object lesson. Nevertheless, that one of the most popular writers in America thus dared to hoist the black flag and thereby lost none of his popularity shows the deplorable conditions existing in the literary world of those days. The *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* were two prominent paste-and-scissors, "thank-ye-or-less" journals which sprang up in the wake of the *Great Eastern*. In one issue they sometimes published complete novels, copies of which they had met an incoming steamer to procure, as soon as they could be rushed into print. The price was as low as ten cents, and occasionally lower.

Yet in spite of such conditions, Willis seems to have been fairly well paid. His magazine ran less than a year, but during its brief life he had arranged for the publication of three books, his royalty to be twenty per cent., with two thousand dollars on account in advance. To most Americans of the period, sales of their books in Europe, if they sold there at all, brought little; but Willis is an example to the contrary. He was known personally in Great Britain, and his works circulated fairly well there. Longmans offered him two hundred pounds for *Romance of Travel*, if published in advance of the American edition. On the last day of 1839, he wrote that his literary receipts in England would amount to \$7,500. When in 1841 he received fifty dollars a page for a contribution of four pages to Godey's *Lady's Book*, the height of extravagance had been reached, his

contemporaries thought. The regular prices for the *Lady's Book*, established in 1830, and *Graham's Magazine*, 1841, were twelve dollars a page in the forties. "The burst on authorland of *Graham's* and *Godey's*," wrote Willis, "was like a sunrise without a dawn." *The Reminiscences of a Journalist*, by C. T. Congdon, says that Willis was the first magazine writer who was fairly well paid. At one time in the early forties he was writing four articles monthly for as many different magazines and getting one hundred dollars for each.

But down to fairly modern times, Willis stands as one of the three or four best paid of American authors, when we take fully into account the income derived from continuous literary activity over a long period of years. Especially is this the case when we consider the ability displayed. He is an illuminating example of the utmost that could be achieved during his literary lifetime, the third, fourth, and fifth decades of the last century, by a facile, popular writer gifted with an extraordinary journalistic instinct and a remarkable social appeal that could commercialize itself in advertising.

Yet the American people were not paying their men of letters of that period for frothy amusement alone. Probably the staid historian Prescott found literature as remunerative in the end as did Willis. Americans should be especially proud of the achievement of Prescott. We might naturally, of course, be supposed to write our own history better than could an outsider; and as long as America remained a land of beckoning promise and of political presage, European immigrant and statesman alike might well be expected to read that history. Again, our second war with Great Britain and the later spectacular successes of our mercantile marine, together with immigration inimical to England, the harsh criticism of British writers, and our own astonishing internal expansion, had engendered a certain amount of self-esteem within us that might well be called over-complacent in many cases. We were ready, then, gladly to acclaim every historian who confirmed our views of our own importance. And equally were we ready to denounce any Cooper, and refuse to buy his books, who questioned it. Under these circumstances, surely the chances for one of our authors to write books upo

European history that would pay him well in Europe might seem to be slight. Yet the genius of Prescott accomplished this.

The English rights to *The Conquest of Peru* were bought by Bentley for four thousand dollars. In 1854 Routledge offered the author one thousand pounds each for as many volumes, not exceeding six, as he chose to write of *The Reign of Philip II*, provided he could give a good copyright. International copyright was then being discussed in the House of Lords. In case there were no adequate protective laws, the publishers offered five hundred pounds for the two first volumes and half that sum for each of the following. Here is a concrete example of what an international copyright meant in money in those days to American writers. Moreover, it leaves entirely too favorable an impression. Prescott was already an established author, a position he had been able to reach partly through inherited wealth and his consequent ability to publish and market his first work. When an author of undeveloped or less aggressive genius could not do this, he ran a very grave risk of remaining forever silent. How many such there are in the course of American history before 1891, only the Recording Angel of Unfulfilled Renown can ever reveal.

Prescott sold his *The Conquest of Mexico* to the Harpers from plates provided by himself. For five thousand copies, they paid him \$7,500 in cash—"an enormous price," the author writes enthusiastically. These same publishers, who, about this period, had a worldwide reputation for the immense volume of their business, gave him \$7,500 in cash on the day of publication for as many copies of *The Conquest of Peru*. These terms, according to Ticknor, were "more liberal than had ever been offered for a work of grave history on this side of the Atlantic." As early as 1846 the Harpers estimated the copyrights of Prescott to be worth \$25,000 each, while the author says that he had already received about \$30,000 on the two histories. His works are but five in number, *Ferdinand and Isabella*, 1837; *The Conquest of Mexico*, 1843; *Biographical and Critical Miscellanies*, 1845; *The Conquest of Peru*, 1847; and *The Reign of Philip II*, 1855-58. By the time of the appearance of this last work, Prescott had a remarkable popularity. He had again returned to Boston

for a publisher, for he was a keen man of business, not unwilling to play off one firm against another. He writes that he is to receive \$6,000 for each of the two volumes of *Philip* and \$6,000 a year for six consecutive years for the right to publish three thousand copies of each of his other historical works. Six months after *Philip* appeared, Prescott is able to record that he has received \$17,000 in the last half year from his Boston publishers. These sums, however, do not represent clear profit, for Prescott must have been at considerable expense in collecting his material.

Here, then, is the very best that a genius could hope to do financially in sustained and earnest years of literary endeavor before the appearance of the modern popular novelist. True, there are examples of large sums made through literature, but they are more or less isolated cases. Bonner, ardent speculator in literary values, estimated in 1868 that Henry Ward Beecher's name had an advertising value of \$20,000. The hopeless novel *Norwood* was the result. In the same way the fames of Grant, Sherman and several Arctic and African explorers were capitalized in book form for large sums. Mrs. Stowe is not a real exception, since she remains for all practical purposes the author of one book. Nor can the sales of Prescott's works be altogether attributed to their sheer literary merit. The intense interest in Mexican affairs caused by the war for Texan independence must have sold many copies of *The Conquest of Mexico*, as Irving knew it would when he himself prepared to write upon the same subject. The kaleidoscopic political changes in which Spain, her colonies or late colonies in South America, and our own Monroe Doctrine figured largely, must have aided the sales of all his other books.

A few years before the middle of the last century, two aspects highly comforting to the financial hopes of the American author begin to make themselves apparent. When, in the wake of the *Great Eastern*, with its comparatively cheap and quick communication with Europe, there sprang up a crop of mammoth weeklies that printed a complete novel of Dickens, Marryat, Bulwer-Lytton, or James in one issue and sold it for a dime, the legitimate publishing houses found themselves engaged in a

desperate strife. Their only recourse was to print and sell more cheaply than the pirates. Having a better financial basis, they finally managed so to undersell their rivals that they were largely driven from the market. But during this bitter struggle, what was happening to American authors? Cooper—and he suffered less than most—writes indignantly to his Philadelphia publishers about the small returns from his works. More than once do they explain to the irate author that to meet the chaotic and depressed state of the publishing business they have been “*compelled*” to reduce prices.

After the pirates had been in some measure driven to cover, there ensued a period of “gentlemanly understanding” whereby the arrangements of a publisher with a foreign author were usually respected. Although cases of infringement repeatedly occurred, yet the comparative stability of the market was a great aid to our struggling authors. The Civil War, with its necessary economic readjustment, again destroyed the good feeling which had been growing up among the publishers. Again chaos came, and again American literary rewards ebbed to an extremely low point.

But for more than a decade before the war and synchronous with the best period of “gentlemanly understanding,” the long struggle for nationalism in American literature was won. True, some remained who regarded lightly any literary production emanating from their own authors. But even among the social and intellectual self-elect their number had so diminished that the pocket-books of our men of letters did not seriously feel their presence. In this twofold victory over pirates and colonial subserviency, even though it be not complete in either case, may be discovered principles which critics would do well to ponder. It is not mere chance that these twenty years or so form the classic age of American literature.

Let it not be understood, however, that the returns to our authors were at all commensurate with their ability as measured by standards existing since 1891. The case was far otherwise, in spite of what Goodrich, the publisher, wrote in 1856: “Nothing is now more marketable than good writing—at least in this country—whatever may be its form: poetry or prose, fact or fiction, reason or romance. If an author is poorly paid, it is

because he writes poorly. I do not think, indeed, that authors are adequately paid, for authorship does not stand on a level with other professions as to pecuniary recompense, but it is certain that a clever, industrious, and judicious writer may make his talent the means of living."

Even with his last sentence, the views of Goodrich are not lacking in optimism. Horace Greeley, speaking apparently about 1870, says that the publishers of 1850 paid hardly a tithe of the prices then accorded favorite authors. Yet both men were right. If prices in 1870 were much higher than in 1850, so too were those of 1856 measurably in advance of rewards that prevailed in 1836. This, however, is merely stating the matter comparatively. Few more pathetic sentences have come down to us from men of genius than these three from Hawthorne in 1849. When he had lost his position in the Custom House at Salem he came home to his wife to say: "I have lost my place. What shall we now do for bread?" And to a friend he writes: "Do not think anything too humble to be mentioned to me."

Emerson in 1849 was having an even harder time with the financial side of literature than was Hawthorne. "Emerson told me in 1849," says Hale, "that he had never then received a dollar for any of his published works." He had been given some copies of his own books, and that was all. One is reminded in this connection of Thoreau's library of "nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself." The entire proceeds of Emerson's literary life were only about thirty thousand dollars, and a little of this, despite Hale's statement, had reached him before 1846.

As already noted, Godey's *Lady's Book* and *Graham's Magazine* were offering noteworthy financial opportunity to American authorship in the forties. Other magazines followed, and although they did not maintain the pace set by either of these or by Bonner in his *Ledger*, yet they were a great improvement financially upon such prices as the *North American Review* had been offering. After the establishment of *Graham's Magazine* in 1841 there was a considerable interval before the appearance of another periodical that was to contribute notably to the financial rewards of American authorship. Then came *Harper's New*

Monthly Magazine in 1850; *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 1853; *Harper's Weekly*, 1856; *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1857; *Scribner's Monthly*, 1870 (*The Century Magazine* after 1881); and *Scribner's Magazine*, 1887; names which link us with the past and are potent factors in our literature to-day. It was of these magazines, save the last one, that the Boston publisher, Mr. Dana Estes, was thinking when he testified before the Senate Committee on Patents in 1886: "I have returned many scores, if not hundreds, of manuscripts of American authors, unopened even, simply from the fact that it is impossible to make the books of most American authors pay, unless they are first published and acquire recognition through the columns of the magazines." Mr. Estes's dismal testimony came at the period when piracy had reached its second high-water mark, largely because, says Mr. Henry Holt in 1888, of the release of so much manufacturing energy after the war. Mr. Holt believes that the decline in our literature in the seventies and eighties from its brilliancy during the age of Hawthorne and Longfellow is largely traceable to the inadequate returns to authorship in those days of aggressive piracy.

Yet the pathway of the magazines was not always rose-strewn. Even one destined to such prominence in after days as the *Atlantic Monthly* had to go slowly at first. Lowell, the editor, wrote concerning four poems Emerson had sent him in 1857: "When I spoke of printing all four I was perhaps greedy, and Mr. Underwood says we can't afford it, reckoning each as a separate poem—which means giving \$50 apiece for them." In a letter to a discontented contributor he says: "Six dollars a page is more than can be got elsewhere, and we pay only ten to folks whose *names* are worth the other four."

The *Atlantic* passed into the hands of Ticknor and Fields in 1859, and Fields later became the editor. He introduced a new practice,—that of payment upon acceptance. He was especially liberal toward those young authors who had not yet acquired "names" to sell. He even sometimes advanced money on articles still to be written, and was known to raise his price when he learned that the contributor particularly needed money, especially in the case of a woman.

It was well for Lowell that he had editorships and a professorship. His returns from literary work were at first very meagre. In 1870 he is able to say that he has lately declined an offer of four thousand dollars a year to write four pages monthly. He speaks in 1887 of his general copyright being worth two thousand dollars a year. "Not much after fifty years of authorship, but enough to keep me from the almshouse." It must not be forgotten, however, that in the cases of Lowell, Irving, Bancroft, Motley, Hawthorne, Taylor and others, literary rewards came indirectly through political appointments.

Not such was the case of Whittier, who, save Poe and some of the Southern authors after the war, had a more protracted struggle with poverty than any other of our classic writers. Whittier's activities as an abolitionist greatly diminished his popularity as an author. That is the chief reason why he is forced to remark during the war that the doors of most magazines and publishing-houses had been closed to him for twenty years. After more than twenty-six years of authorship, he writes to the editor of the *Atlantic* in 1857, who apparently had asked him what he expected for his contribution, that for *Skipper Ireson's Ride*, the poem in question, he could get fifty dollars elsewhere. But he adds, doubtfully: "It is not worth it, perhaps." His first marked success did not come until *Snow-Bound* was published in 1866. Before that time his work had been done under depressing circumstances; for, unlike Longfellow, he had no private means.

When one approaches the twentieth century, he passes rapidly from facts that make history to guesses that make gossip. He may pause, however, to note Bayard Taylor's discussion of royalties. In 1865 he writes: "The publishers seem to consider ten per cent. on the retail price as a sort of *par*, above which they only allow an author to rise when he is sufficiently popular to enforce better terms. This, of course, is considerably less than half profits (in ordinary times), which ought to be the standard. Mr. Putnam estimates that twelve and one-half per cent. is about equivalent to half profits, and Mr. Irving and myself accepted this estimate, the publisher paying for the plates and owning them." Although Taylor was able about this time to secure a

royalty of fourteen per cent., yet in 1873 he is forced to write that for two years past he had received no income of any sort from property or copyrights.

The spectacular financial successes in American literature since 1891 have usually been won through the novel. What a far cry it is from the unending flood of fiction that now deluges us to the day in 1836 when Bryant wrote that the literary world was running very much to novels. "Here are three in one week." A prominent publisher writing well within this century says that there are possibly a dozen American novelists who have large incomes from their work, while many more have comfortable ones. None of them, however, he asserts, has found authorship so lucrative as the writers of gossip for the literary journals would have us believe. It may be true that *Richard Carvel* brought the author "first and last as a book and as a play," \$300,000, and that Mr. Dixon realized \$245,000 from *The Clansman*. Equally true it may be that \$5,000, as much as Poe received for all his short stories, has been paid for a single short story of as many words, and that one publication has an unalterable minimum of five cents a word for what fiction it uses.

If these figures be correct, all prosperous authors of our day should indeed be thankful that they were not contemporaries of Charles Brockden Brown, in whose time an American novel was regarded with suspicion, not to say contempt. What would have been their fate when Irving was driven from the market, and Scott in pirated editions sold at one-tenth the British price? Thankful, also, they ought to be that they did not, as did Bayard Taylor, have to face the second blossoming period of piracy. They should review that long bitter fight from 1837 to 1891 that in most cases made their success possible. And they should be grateful to those men, Matthews, G. P. Putnam, Bryant, Gay, Stedman, W. H. Appleton and others, who finally won the battle for right, often desperate though it seemed, which was to establish, as Lowell put it, that "there is one thing better than a cheap book, and that is a book honestly come by."

EARL L. BRADSHER.

The University of Texas.